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North Carolina A&T State University
School of Agriculture and
Environmental Sciences
Newsletter
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A&T's Cooperative Extension Program celebrates silver anniversary of honoring small-scale agriculture

Since 1987, N.C. A&T State University has set aside one week to herald the accomplishments of small-scale agriculture, and to honor one farmer or farm family for outstanding performance. Those recognitions are the basis of N.C. Small Farms Week and the N.C. Small Farmer of the Year, which celebrate 25 years of success this year.

"What we have done is brought recognition to the small farmers and the valued contribution they make to North Carolina," says Dr. M. Ray McKinnie, administrator of The Cooperative Extension Program that produces small farms week activities.

In honoring farmers and their achievements, Cooperative Extension also continues to proclaim the importance of agriculture to A&T's land-grant mission of teaching, research and Extension. Today's agricultural

careers can be as varied as food science, animal sciences, agricultural economics and biological engineering. Yet, the primary goal of Small Farms Week was and is to celebrate farming.

When the first observance was held in 1987, there were 52,398 small-scale farms in North Carolina, compared with 45,766 in that same category reported in the 2007 Census of Agriculture (the most recent year for which statistics are available). The majority of farms in North Carolina 25 years ago, and today, are indeed small in size: 20,772 farms are 10–49 acres, compared to 18,088 farms of that size in 1987. Another 17,830 farms are 50–179 acres, down from 22,680 acres 25 years ago, and 5,786 farms are 180–499 acres, again a decrease from 25 years ago, when there were 9,337 farms in that category.



Yet the change most evident to McKinnie in 25 years of recognition is how farmers have adapted to computer literacy as a means for more effective farming. Extension has been a primary resource in helping educate farmers — through the Farmers Adopting Computer Training (FACT) program — about electronic media. More than one FACT alumnus is on record about how he mistook the computer monitor for a television screen during his initial encounters with computers, but nonetheless went on to become a confident user of computer hardware and software.

"Loans for farms, grant applications, workshops and information, and all kinds of information that farmers need are now in an electronic format and many small farmers are being driven in this direction," McKinnie says. "Some of the

Schedule highlights for this year's Small Farms Week activities — celebrated March 21–26 — include:

- Orange County Agricultural Summit, as part of kickoff ceremonies March 21.
- Tours of Joe Thompson's Prawn Farm and Tiny Farm, also on March 21 in Orange County.
- Educational Forum, where experts will discuss management, finance and development issues, March 22 at the A&T University Farm.
- Small Farmers' Appreciation Day featuring Small Farmers' Appreciation Luncheon on March 23 at N.C. A&T.

more astute farmers are accepting the challenge and moving in that direction.

"What farmers are seeing now is that the world is based upon a business premise and a business doctrine. We're even seeing older farmers sign up to become involved in the FACT program, recognizing that farming is a business entity and they need to become computer literate to better navigate the terrain."

The overall development of business acumen is also vital to ensuring farm success, McKinnie says, noting that: "Farming is a cultural practice, agribusiness is the enterprise."



Joe Thompson, the 2010 Small Farmer of the Year, shows off one of the hefty crustaceans raised on his prawn farm.

Small Farms Week Schedule of Events *March 21–26*

Monday, March 21

8:30 a.m. — Orange County Agricultural Summit and Small Farms Week Kickoff
CEDAR GROVE RURITAN CLUB
(6116 Efland-Cedar Grove Road, Cedar Grove)

Gerry Cohn, a regional coordinator for CROPP Cooperative/Organic Valley, the largest organic farmer-owned co-op in the U.S., will be presiding. Bernadette Telissier, Chair of Orange County Board of Commissioners, and Dr. M. Ray McKinnie, associate dean and administrator for The Cooperative Extension Program at A&T, will issue the official welcomes.

8:45–11:15 a.m. — Orange County Agricultural Summit

Moderator: Mike Lanier, Agribusiness Agent, Orange County Extension

- **Retrospective on Developments in Orange County Agriculture** — Mike Lanier
- **Blue Ridge Food Ventures** — Mary Lou Surgi, Executive Director
- **Break** — 10:15–10:35 a.m.
- **Orange County Environment and Resource Conservation Department** — David Stancil, Director
- **Farmland Foods and Piedmont Grown Branding Efforts** — Jennifer Curtis, NC Choices and Dr. Noah Ranells, Orange County Agricultural Economic Development Coordinator

11:15 a.m. — The 2010 Small Farmer of the Year Video

Dr. M. Ray McKinnie, associate dean and administrator for The Cooperative Extension Program at A&T, will introduce the video, which features Joe Thompson of Orange County, the winner of the 2010 Small Farmer of the Year Award.

11:30 a.m. — A Preview of 2010 Small Farms Week Activities in Greensboro and across the state — Dr. M. Ray McKinnie

Noon — Lunch on site

1:30–3 p.m. — Tour of Joe Thompson's Farm and Prawn Nursery and Tiny Farm

In October of 2010, the Thompson farm was well on target to hit major production objectives in its five-year management plan for prawn (a shrimp-like crustacean) production when a tornado hit and destroyed at least \$100,000 worth of equipment and supplies. Thompson is still in business, however, and has even more advice to pass along to fellow agricultural entrepreneurs as recovery continues. Specializing in lettuce, collards, spinach and other greens, Mark Hockney's Tiny Farm relies on five greenhouses for year-round production. Tiny Farm's greenhouses are heated with solar energy and all inputs for vegetable production are OMRI (organic use) certified.

Tuesday, March 22

1–4:30 p.m. — Educational Forum
A&T STATE UNIVERSITY FARM
HORTICULTURE UNIT

Welcome and Introductions: Dr. Keith Baldwin, regional program coordinator, A&T Extension

Topics and featured speakers:

1:10–1:30 p.m.

Risk Management Strategies for Small-Scale Producers — Cliff Parker, Custom Ag Solutions

1:30–1:45 p.m.

Financing Specialty Crop Enterprises
— Courtney Owens, associate, A&T Extension

1:45–2:10 p.m.

Sequential Scheduling of Vegetable Enterprises
— Dr. Keith Baldwin, regional program coordinator, A&T Extension

2:10–2:30 p.m.

Growing Out Vegetables — Grace Summers, associate, A&T Extension

2:30–2:55 p.m. — **Break**

2:55–3:35 p.m.

Lettuce Production for Early Markets In and Out of Tunnels — Rickie Holness and Kurt Taylor, associates, A&T Extension

1:30–1:45 p.m.

Financing Specialty Crop Enterprises — Courtney Owens, associate, A&T Extension

3:35–3:50 p.m.

IPM for Lettuce — Dr. Louis Jackai, chair of A&T Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Design

3:50–4:05 p.m.

Lettuce Production in Agroforestry Systems
— Dr. Manuel Reyes, Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Design

4:05–4:20 p.m.

Post-Harvest Handling for Product Quality and Safety — Dr. Keith Baldwin, regional program coordinator and Dr. Jimo Ibrahim, Extension farm safety, energy and environmental specialist, A&T Extension

Evaluation — Dr. Niki Whitley, animal science specialist, A&T Extension

Wednesday, March 23

Small Farmers' Appreciation Day at N.C. A&T

STALLINGS BALLROOM
(Memorial Student Union Building, A&T campus)

8:30–10 a.m. — Panel Discussion:

Guidelines for product quality and marketing to grocery store retailers and restaurants

Moderators: Dr. John O'Sullivan, farm management and marketing specialist, and Courtney Owens, associate, A&T Extension

Panelists:

- Jay Pierce, executive chef, Lucky 32 Restaurant, Greensboro
- Mark Sienko, proprietor, Harper's Restaurant, Greensboro
- Stephen Tracey, food safety manager for supply chain, Food Lion
- Ruffin Slater, general manager, Weaver Street Market, Durham
- Matt Felling, produce manager/buyer, Deep Roots Market, Greensboro
- Brent Demarest, South region produce buyer, Whole Foods Market, Winston Salem

10–10:30 a.m. — Let Us (Lettuce) Taste: Consumer Sensory Evaluation

Facilitators: Dr. Montreka Dansby, Extension nutrition specialist, and Dr. Mallory Lovett, nutrition program coordinator, A&T Extension

Farmers and other guests will get a chance to sample five lettuce cultivars and evaluate the samples on appearance, taste and texture.

10:30–11 a.m. — Meal in Minutes Demonstration

A chef from Greensboro's Green Valley Grill will provide creative ideas for using lettuce crops.

Noon — Small Farmers' Appreciation Luncheon

ALUMNI FOUNDATION EVENTS CENTER
(Bluford Street and Benbow Road on the A&T campus)

Dr. M. Ray McKinnie, associate dean and administrator for The Cooperative Extension Program, will be presiding. Dr. Donald McDowell, interim dean of the School of Agriculture and Environmental Sciences at A&T, Steve Troxler, North Carolina Commissioner of Agriculture, and Dr. Joe Zublena, Director of the N.C. Cooperative Extension Service at N.C. State University will have a few remarks before the featured speaker is introduced. The featured speaker (to be announced) is an authority on small-scale agriculture, with some special insights on the opportunities for small-scale farmers in the current economic climate.

Student Research Poster Competition Winners

ALUMNI FOUNDATION EVENTS CENTER

The Agricultural Research Program and the A&T chapter of Gamma Sigma Delta, the honor society for agriculture, have a research poster contest for SAES students in conjunction with Small Farms Week each year. The three top entries in both the graduate and undergraduate competitions will be on display at the Alumni Foundation Events Center during the Small Farmers' Appreciation Day luncheon.

An update on the 24 winners of the North Carolina A&T Small Farmer Award Sponsored by the Cooperative Extension Program

- 2010: **JOE THOMPSON**, ORANGE COUNTY
Added a new high-tunnel greenhouse and more prawn ponds, and is still working with Cooperative Extension.
- 2009: **JOHN L. COUNCIL FARMS**, HOKE COUNTY
Still farming and continuing to work with Cooperative Extension
- 2008: **MARY AND NELSON JAMES**, PENDER COUNTY
Still farming and working with Cooperative Extension.
- 2007: **GARY MORRELL**, ALEXANDER COUNTY
Continues to operate his popular orchards and work with Cooperative Extension
- 2006: **ANN AND HAROLD WRIGHT**, BLADEN COUNTY
Added a high-tunnel greenhouse to their farm operation, still working with Cooperative Extension
- 2005: **KIRBY AND NATHANIEL MARAM**, WATAUGA COUNTY
Still farming and working with Cooperative Extension
- 2004: **STANLEY HUGHES**, ORANGE COUNTY
Added a high-tunnel greenhouse to his farm operation, and is still working with Cooperative Extension
- 2003: **AMY LOCKLEAR-CUMMINGS AND ELLERY LOCKLEAR**, ROBESON COUNTY
Added a high-tunnel greenhouse to their farm; added floriculture to their production mix and are still working with Cooperative Extension
- 2002: **JAMES A. DAVIS III**, HALIFAX COUNTY
Gone from full-time to part-time farming
- 2001: **BURNICE BLANKS**, ROBESON COUNTY
Deceased
- 2000: **WILLIE WOOLARD**, MARTIN COUNTY
Gone from full-time to part-time farming, but is still working with Cooperative Extension
- 1999: **JAMES DUNN**, WAKE COUNTY
Still running his agribusinesses
- 1998: **BARBARA AND LESKER LOYIED NORRIS**, WAKE COUNTY
Still farming and have a relationship with Cooperative Extension
- 1997: **BARBARA AND LARRY PIERCE**, HALIFAX COUNTY
Still farming and working with Cooperative Extension
- 1996: **JACKIE GARNER**, BLADEN COUNTY
Still raising cattle and working with Cooperative Extension
- 1995: **BETSY AND ALEX HITT**, ALAMANCE COUNTY
Still farming and working with Cooperative Extension
- 1994: **HAROLD DAVIS**, YANCEY COUNTY
Still farming and working with Cooperative Extension
- 1993: **ELTON SMITH**, HALIFAX COUNTY
Deceased
- 1992: **CHARLES D. SNEED**, FRANKLIN COUNTY
No longer full-time livestock farming, but still working with Cooperative Extension on gardening
- 1991: **LINDA WOODY**, YANCEY COUNTY
Retired from farming, but maintains a family garden
- 1990: **ROBERT EDMONDS JR.**, HALIFAX COUNTY
Deceased
- 1989: **LONNIE HARRISON JR.**, WARREN COUNTY
Retired from farming in 2000
- 1988: **KENNETH TOBLER**, SURRY COUNTY
Still farming, working occasionally with Cooperative Extension
- 1987: **ROY ROBERTSON**, STOKES COUNTY
Still farming and working with Cooperative Extension

Extension district conferences announced

N.C. A&T and N.C. State universities are resuming district Extension conferences this year to rally and reward approximately 1,300 Extension employees. Seven sessions are scheduled across the state from March 29 to April 13, including a March 31 stop at the Alumni Foundation-Event Center at A&T. The series will be the first of its kind for state Extension personnel since 2008.

"We can't do a full-fledged state conference this year because of the economic constraints being faced by the state, but there is a need to bring people together so we can continue to prepare them to do the high-quality work needed by our customers in these challenging times," says Dr. Celvia Stovall, associate administrator of The Cooperative Extension Program at A&T.

Stovall is a key organizer and — along with Dr. Ed Jones of N.C. State — a moderator at each event. Conference highlights include sessions on defining high quality programs and on why advocacy is important, presented respectively by Dr. Claudette Smith of A&T and Dr. Marshall Stewart of N.C. State. Both are Extension program leaders for 4-H Youth Development and Family and Consumer Sciences.

Dr. Celvia Stovall

Responsive programs help solve people's problems and advocacy is the means by which Extension staff relate to their audience, according to conference organizers.

"With pending budget cuts, Extension clients want to know how to express their appreciation of our life-changing programs to elected officials and other funders," Stovall says. "We want to ensure that our staff fully recognizes the value of advocacy, not just for our clients, but also for our programs and the valuable work that we do."

The sessions will also include remarks from Extension administrators Dr. M. Ray McKinnie of A&T, and Dr. Joe Zublena of N.C. State, as well as taped messages from the university's chancellors, Dr. Harold L. Martin Sr. of A&T and Dr. Randy Woodson of N.C. State.

The conferences are scheduled for:

- March 29 **Madison County**
West District
- March 30 **Iredell County**
West Central District
- March 31 **Guilford County**
North Central District
- April 1 **Cumberland County**
South Central District
- April 12 **Vernon James Center, Washington County**
Northeast District
- April 13 **Duplin County**
Southeast District

To register for any Small Farms Week activities, visit the School of Agriculture and Environmental Sciences Web page, www.ag.ncat.edu. A \$20 registration fee is required for Tuesday and Wednesday's activities. Small Farmers who register in advance are exempt. The registration deadline is March 11.

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Program at A&T's multimedia
annual report, will be available
at all Small Farms Week activities
in Greensboro, and at the
Small Farms Week Kickoff in
Cedar Grove. To get your name
on the mailing list for a copy of
Solutions in years to come, visit:
[www.ag.ncat.edu/communications/
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